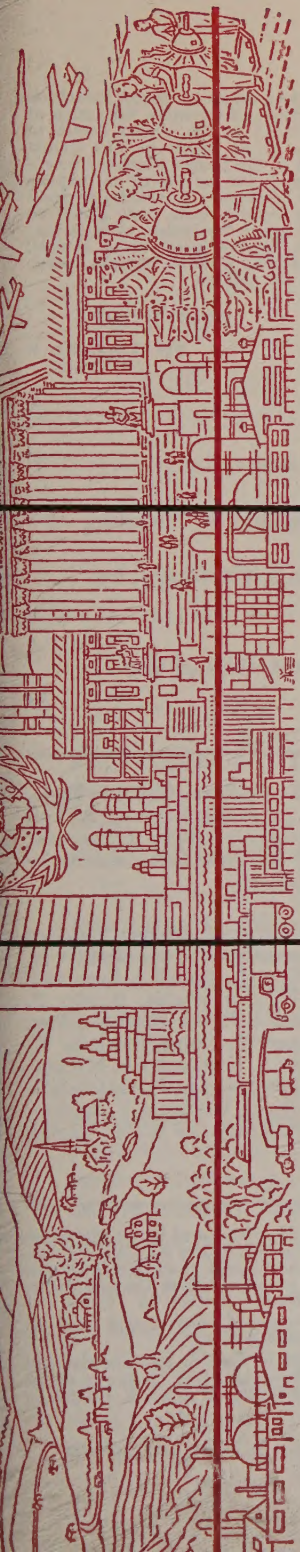

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November 1958

SOCIAL PROGRESS

WHERE ARE OUR ROOTS?

—Reformed Theology
and Social Ethics

SOCIAL PROGRESS

Published by the Department of Social Education and Action of the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (functioning as an agency of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America) to provide a forum for the church on subjects of social concern for Christians. It includes program resources, legislative developments, and guides to worship, study, and action for leaders of social action groups in local churches, presbyteries, synods, presbyterial and synodical societies. Articles represent the opinions of the authors.

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From This Vantage Point

Periodically, we believe, an issue of SOCIAL PROGRESS ought to be a "think piece." It should challenge and stretch the theological and intellectual equipment of the reader by forcing him either to think hard or else to lay down the magazine. In short, it should separate the men from the boys.

We like to think this is one of those issues, and warn the reader that it may be difficult reading. In one sense, it does not deal with "practical" problems of social action at all. In another sense, however, it is concerned about the most "practical" of all the problems of social action: How do you get from the gospel to responsible participation in contemporary society?

Jesus spoke of "the truth that will make you free." What is the relationship between this freedom and civil liberties? The Old Testament speaks of justice between master and servant. What is justice between a giant corporation and a great labor union? "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." But in a highly complex, organized society just what is Caesar's and what is God's? Does the Bible deal only with "spiritual" matters (and what are they, if so)? How do you get from the pastoral world of the Bible to the industrialized world of today? Or do you keep them in separate compartments? And why is it that people who read the same Bible, even belong to the same theological community, differ so widely among themselves as to how they feel about politics or race relations, for example? Why

don't some apparently devout Christians seem even to care about these things?

Three papers by distinguished contemporary scholars attempt to cast light on these questions. At the time these papers were written, the authors were all on the faculty of McCormick Seminary: Joseph Haroutunian, Systematic Theology; Willem F. Zuurdeeg, Philosophy of Religion; and Edward A. Dowey, Church History. Since then Dr. Dowey has gone to the faculty of Princeton Seminary.

The papers themselves came out of a two-year study seminar in which the staff members of the SEA Department as "practitioners" engaged in regular conversations with nine members of the McCormick faculty as "theorists." Space limitations do not permit the inclusion of the other excellent papers (or the even more provocative discussions) that were struck off in these encounters.

It is significant that similar wrestlings with the problem of the gospel's relevance to a world in revolution are going on among Christians in Europe and the Far East—wherever the church is found. "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible," pp. 28-31 represents one of these ecumenical efforts.

We wish the reader well in *his* wrestling.

—The SEA Staff

Freedom and Liberty

By Joseph Haroutunian

Freedom of speech, press, assembly, worship, the right to "due process of law," are civil liberties bought with blood in Western culture. Although they are guaranteed by our Federal Constitution and many state constitutions, their protection in fact is a constantly precarious struggle on the part of a few individuals and organizations that are particularly concerned about them. Laxity on the part of the lower courts, sporadic surges of reaction in the legislatures, and a social climate that is more congenial to conformity than to liberty constantly threaten to erode these civil liberties.

Although it has become a cliché on the part of many Christians to ascribe credit to the Christian tradition for our heritage of liberty in America, the theological and historical connection between "the freedom of the Christian man" and civil liberties is by no means clear. While many devout Christians would protest loudly if *their* freedom of worship were taken away, the churches, except at the national level, have characteristically disengaged themselves from the daily struggle in the courts and legislatures to protect this heritage.

Professor Haroutunian's provocative article suggests that no special grace is needed to desire liberty for oneself or for others, for that matter. Jews, humanists, Christians, atheists, idealists, politicians can all be found distinguishing themselves in almost any civil liberties case—frequently outnumbering the evangelical Protestants. And yet, he continues, Christian freedom in Jesus Christ has an indispensable element to add to the struggle. Without it, the most virulent injustices are engendered in the very effort to enhance liberty. Even more serious, if the churches do not prefer liberty for everyone *above* their own freedom and security, they are in fact endangering their own integrity as inheritors of the grace of life.

OUR problem is, On what grounds is the church to espouse the cause of civil liberty? It is quite obvious that there are traditional and historical, naturalistic and humanistic, unitarian and idealistic reasons given for the pursuit of liberty. We do not in the least wish to minimize or disqualify them. Still, our business in this paper is to put forth the question of liberty and the answer to it in the light of the Christian faith, and more particularly the Bible.

First, there is the question as to whether liberty in society as stated above is a Biblical good. My old teacher of the Old Testament, Julius

A. Bewer, used to say that social righteousness was taught much more explicitly and fully in the Old Testament than in the New. Many Christians who profess to derive their ethics from the New Testament insist that the freedom envisaged in the teaching of Jesus is personal and spiritual rather than social and political. Here we meet a problem of interpretation which cannot be overlooked. My solution to it is that of Calvin, who taught that the substance of the laws of God was the same in the two Testaments. The social teaching of the Old Testament is an unfolding and explication of the great commandment. Jesus fulfilled the law in the sense that he uncovered its essence, and he nowhere denied the continued authority of the law of Moses or the prophetic interpretations and applications of it.

According to Calvin, the two Testaments contain the same law of God, and if we are to understand it properly we must see it in the light of Jesus Christ, not only his teaching but also his "work." Christ is the light who illuminates the whole of the Bible and therefore the law of God in particular. So we are not to discard the Law and the Prophets, because a Greater has come; we are to embrace them as the word of God to us, the word become flesh in Christ. Therefore, "the social teachings" of the Old Testament are not destroyed but fulfilled in Christ. Christ is our light. But with this light how are we to see and understand the Scriptures, which are the Law and the Prophets as well as the Gospels and Epistles? This should dispose of, for the present, the question as to whether "social freedom" is a Christian concern. . . .

It must be of paramount importance that our obedience to the law became possible by the death of Christ. I say, the death, not as against his life and resurrection, but as essential for our understanding the nature of his own obedience. The death of Christ was nothing if not an act of obedience, and that to the eternal law of God. It occurred by the operation of the law and in response to it. It was according to the law and in proclamation of it once for all. Christ revealed the "soul" of the law (Calvin) by fulfilling it not only with his words but also by his life-death-resurrection.

What then is the law so fulfilled? It is the law of human life, Biblically viewed, that love is greater than life itself. There is another law of life whose chief end is to maintain life. This is the law we seem to find in the animal kingdom as a whole, the law that governs human behavior as we normally know it. Not everything men do is intended for bare preservation, but self-preservation, in so far as we exist under the threat of death, is a decisive and pervasive factor in our behavior; so much so that without the law of self-preservation, the basic pattern of human behavior as inspired by self-love makes no sense. Men indeed seek goods, security, power, reputation, pleasure, friendship, and so on; their concrete pursuit can be readily recognized as deriving from such motives, which make for an endless plurality of objectives. Still, if we remove the law of self-preservation, or the vehement impulses of the liv-

ing to live, it is as though we had taken the starch out of human activity. Again, men do in fact perpetrate what is called "injustice" in the Bible; they rob, oppress, exploit, deal violently, and even murder, for the sake of money, power, security, comfort, etc. But injustice derives its brutal force and excruciating sting from the same law that makes men cling to life as the absolute good. There has been no inhumanity of man to man which has not been exonerated—if not openly, at least tacitly by common consent—on the ground that it followed the law of life which is a desperate cleaving to life as the absolute good.

I wish to emphasize that this law of our lives is expressed in its full force in our social relationships, in what man does in fact do to man, as he seeks the goods acknowledged as such by mankind in general. In personal relationships, with their limited scope and frequent distance from "the struggle for existence," the impulse for self-preservation is relaxed, and this basic law of life is not too evident. Therefore, those who reserve the province of ethics to personal relations are not too impressed with the virulence of inhumanity. But when we keep our eye on social life, as the Old Testament enjoins, the depth and extent of man's disobedience to the law of God becomes manifest.

The death of Christ was the ultimate judgment upon the law of life as it prevails among us—the law out of which comes the injustice prohibited by the law of God and condemned by his prophets. It was the final declaration that absolute love of one's life is not the law of human life, that it is rather the corruption of humanity and all of man's works. Christ was crucified for political reasons which were justified ultimately by the law of self-preservation. The innocent was sacrificed for the public good, and public good was the maintenance of public life. Christ himself died voluntarily because he knew something beyond self-preservation, which is the love of man for his neighbor. By his death, Christ fulfilled the law of an authentically human life, which is faith working by love.

Why have men killed, stolen, lied, maligned, been unfaithful, and coveted, with oppressions and cruelties? Once again, they have done such things for money, food, power, security, etc. But in and through it all they have been propelled by an impulse deep in their beings; the law of their lives, which is that they have cleaved to life itself as the ultimate good. And why, in spite of the law of God and of all his prophets, did God's own people, age after age, in prosperity or adversity, bring upon themselves unanimous condemnation by continued inhumanities in which they broke every commandment of the law? Surely it was because they yielded to a law of their lives which was nonetheless a radical violation of their essential humanity.

What then is the law of God? It is the law of human life as revealed in Christ Jesus, as we find it in Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. It is a law that stands in grand and awesome opposition to the law by which men seek life as an absolute good and thus fill the world with oppressions and misery. The

law of Moses as interpreted by the prophets and fulfilled by Jesus Christ is a law that has always stood over against the way in which people conduct their lives. That is why the prevailing tenor of Biblical prophecy (until the exile!) is one of judgment against the people. Justice, kindness, mercy—in short, love of humanity, especially in social life—are constantly overwhelmed and undone by man's deep obsession with the precariousness of his life. As men cling to life as the absolute good, truth, right, friendship, justice, begin to fly out the window, or are constantly shoved under the rug. Integrity and love on the one hand, and man's perennial and decisive anxiety for his life, do not mix. A man can be a just man, or he can be an anxious man; but he cannot be both at the same time. But since man's life is pervaded and formed by his anxiety, and so his humanity is both vitiated and overcome, God chose himself a people and gave them his law toward the restoration of mankind to its essential humanity, to its freedom to exist by truth and justice.

The law of God is given as a set of commandments and statutes. It is the law of God and not the law of man or the law that in fact governs human life. But it is not merely a rule for living. It is in fact a mirror of man's true nature and destiny. It is the law that calls man to be free and faithful to his humanity. Justice and love are exercises of freedom; they are the very expressions of it. No man can be just without being free—free from anxiety for his life, and free to love his neighbor as himself. Actually what the law of God enjoins is that men be free and live as creatures whose only proper destiny is freedom; a freedom whose only proper expression is that love which acts according to the neighbor's own freedom.

What is freedom from "the law, the devil, sin, death, the world, and wrath" basically but freedom from anxiety and its works of death? How could the devil tempt us if we were not anxious for our lives? What is the power of death but anxiety, and the power of sin, but cleaving to life more than the truth? Surely we would not corrupt the law of God and turn it into an occasion of pride and injustice were it not that we would wield power over our own lives; and sin would not be so strong in us and wrath so terrible, if it were not that we tremble daily for the breath of our flesh.

But since the Bible brands anxiety itself as guilty, we have to go farther for understanding of freedom. Injustice grows out of anxiety, but anxiety itself grows out of sin. Anxiety in man is not a natural outcome of the love of life; and the love of life absolutely is a corruption of humanity. There is no primary freedom which makes anxiety a violation of our nature. There is a sense in which we share a certain aversion to death with all living beings. But what makes us human is the freedom to love our neighbors. The crown of the glory of men is love, the freedom to love, even though we would not know the glory of love without the power of death in our lives. This is the primordial freedom which is obedience to the law of God, from which flow faith, love, faithfulness, justice, kindliness, patience, forgive-

ness, and all that makes our lives human according to Christ Jesus. Behind the freedom from anxiety which is definitive of freedom in a negative sense, there is the positive freedom of the human spirit to love God and all his creatures according to the excellencies with which he has endowed them. This is an intelligent freedom which is adumbrated in the thesis that "man is a rational animal."

However, I wish to point out that a solid apprehension of the freedom for love is by faith; more precisely by the illumination and persuasion by the Spirit of God that Jesus is the bearer of man's "original righteousness." Our own spontaneous understanding presents our anxiety as an all too natural and even inevitable consequence of expected nonexistence. Are we not animals or living beings endowed not only with the will to live, but also with memory and imagination? What could be more natural than that death should fill our lives with anxiety, with its effects of introversion, indifference toward our neighbors, and even fear and cruelty toward them? There is a common "psychological" interpretation of selfishness and inhumanity in terms of despair and frustration that presents our misery of lovelessness as, at worst, a corruption of a natural self-love by anxiety, which is all too understandable if we consider "human nature" and the perils that surround us. Some such interpretation of our troubles is what we contemplate by the unaided working of our own minds. In this way what we called "the primary freedom" is observed and even denied and repudiated as not only fanciful but also vicious. For, how can we deal with anxiety and its ill effects if we attribute it not to a known and manageable cause but to an act of freedom that seems to be as obscure as it is hidden? We have in fact neither the competence nor the inclination to take a clear and obvious view of our freedom as human beings. We are offended by our very birthmark as "intelligent creation," and know neither our freedom nor our humanity.

Hence, it is the greatest gift we have received as human beings that Christ, by his life, death, and resurrection, has once again confronted us with our freedom. But God who was in Christ has not only given us an exemplar of freedom, but has also given us his Spirit who works freedom in us, or restores us to our freedom. He makes us free, and our new freedom is expressed in the confession that not to love is to sin. So begins our Christian life with repentance and hope for the freedom that works by love and is known by faith as the ground of love and justice and all the elements of a good society.

It is necessary to remember that man's true freedom is represented by the Bible as expressed in obedience, and the converse is true. Obedience before God is an act of freedom; for to obey is to acknowledge and love, which are acts of freedom. This were more than a paradox, it were nonsense, if it be not that the working of the Spirit of God is unique as God's working, in a manner beyond our imagination. God's acting is the ground of our freedom, or that which he makes is free. The Spirit

alone makes us free, free for love. He alone removes our anxiety by the word of God made flesh and addressed to us. So he makes us free by uniting us with Christ, and restoring us to himself. In all this, as he created us without our help, so he redeems us who need his help. As our freedom as human beings is an act of God alone, so our recovery of this freedom is an act of spontaneous grace. We say this not to revive the threadbare controversy against Pelagianism, but to emphasize that human freedom as we have it in Christ Jesus is the decisive locus of our existence as creatures. To be free is to live and die without anxiety. But we do not in fact so live and die. Therefore, our life is "hid with Christ in God." If our life is so hid, so also is our freedom, for our freedom is our life as human beings.

Now, it would be quite false and unedifying to disregard the simple and common doctrines of freedom as the absence of external, illegitimate, and coercive constraint upon human beings. We are obviously free when no impediment is put in our way to our pursuit of happiness. We are free when we are able to follow our desires, reason, and imagination in accomplishing some good or acquiring some goods. We are "higher animals" and have our needs for food, shelter, comfort, security, and the good will and respect of our fellow men. There are in fact organic or vital urges (Reinhold Niebuhr), which drive us, with the aid of imagination and under the sundry stimuli of social environment, to seek after the means of prosperity. In the pursuit of good and goods we do exercise self-love and appreciate our own well-being better than that of our neighbor. So we follow our several ways and engage in economic and political enterprise with a keen eye on our own interests. And we want to be free as we try to make a living and enjoy life, in the sense that we want social life so arranged as to help us rather than hinder us in pursuit of well-being. This is the kind of freedom we desire and are constantly interested in. We want to be free to complete and acquire what good we can. So we speak of political freedom and economic opportunity (or freedom) as obvious goods worth fighting and even dying for, since without these we would be deeply wounded and in a real sense even destroyed.

Freedom in the above sense might better be called liberty. It is made necessary by the constitution of man as a calculating and imaginative animal. And since man is in fact such an animal, it is intelligent and rational that he have liberty. Liberty is grounded in nature and reason. Its value has been appreciated since the beginning of history and far and wide in our world. It is today desired fiercely in many lands and among many people; by Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists, and "irreligious" people. It takes no special revelation for people to know it and no special grace for them to pursue it. Where liberty is curtailed or denied, some special and high-sounding or even "scientific" reason must be provided to justify its diminution or absence. In short, the pursuit of liberty is natural as man is man, and when it is repudiated there

is a suspicion of violence to his nature. Therefore, the logical foundation of liberty in the Christian faith must always be questionable. *The pursuit of liberty is rooted not in what we have called man's freedom but in his animality as illumined by his reason and imagination.*

Moreover, we should not deny that (as Reinhold Niebuhr has insisted) even love as a sense of kinship and justice as mutuality are related to the animal we call man; they are natural in that he desires them and feels responsible to exercise them. Hatred, injustice, oppression, lies, exploitation, and the like are evil; and a man need only be rational and imaginative, and in a sense true to himself, not only to admit but also to affirm that they are evils. The fact that the world has been full of these evils by no means proves that mankind has been bereft of the sense of truth, the impulse for love, or the knowledge of justice. Given the human organism and mind, "liberty and justice for all" is an authentic and spontaneous cry of "the rational animal." So, it is absurd to say that the love of liberty and justice are limited to a fraction of mankind blessed with a special revelation in the matter. In short, the thesis that liberty and justice are exclusively Christian ideas is permanently debatable and appears patently false.

It has been pointed out repeatedly and well that liberty as we know it in Western civilization, and justice and equality in our political life, are products not only of Christianity but also of the Greek and Roman societies. The advocates of democracy as we know it were not commonly orthodox Christians, and they received their inspiration not from the study of Christian doctrines but from reason wrestling with the social life. If they followed "natural religion," many of their ardent followers since the eighteenth century have been no theists at all. In any case, the history of Western democracy is much too complex to justify the conviction of good Christians that the idea of liberty, and even zeal for it, are Biblical and only Biblical. It cannot even be shown that any theology or philosophy is necessary as a basis for "the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness" for all. . . .

But the Bible itself is witness that rapine, oppressions, with wanton cruelties and bloodletting have been much too common to make liberty with justice in the world impressive. Tyrants have stalked the earth from the beginning, and power, rather than truth or justice, has settled matters among men. Even while truth and justice are natural to man as a rational being, it has been his second and operative nature to lie and wrong and play the devil with peace. . . .

Nevertheless, if our understanding of the seat of freedom in a peculiarly human ability to prefer faithfulness to life itself be correct, we must acknowledge that faithfulness to truth and our neighbor is definitive of freedom. Although political liberty is a dictate of intelligent and rational self-love in principle, actually it does not flourish without a wisdom rooted in the freedom of the human spirit in relation to the will to live. *The same will to live that, united with reason, inspires political*

liberty does in fact confuse and vitiate our practice of it because of the bondage of the same will to death, and the anxiety and irrationality that go with such bondage. Without freedom liberty withers and in spite of reason it is sacrificed to the will to live turned into a lust for life, a lust that has the savor of death.

It seems to me that the whole meaning of God's dealings with men as recorded in the Bible is that freedom is necessary for liberty. The law of God revealed to Moses, which requires faithfulness among men, expressed in terms of justice, mercy, and love, can be obeyed only in freedom. Only free men can be just or love their neighbor as themselves. In a sense, the commandment of God is, Thou shalt be free, free from anxiety and lust, free for truth and justice. Freedom, and therefore truth and justice, are indeed natural to man as he is in Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, they are the law of God as set in opposition to the law of human behavior. Hence we find that the law of God as stated and explained by the prophets is an occasion for judgment and condemnation. But in prophecy, it is also an occasion of the Messianic hope; of the hope that the same God who commands shall also make obedience or freedom. And in Christ Jesus, this hope is fulfilled so that the Lord and the Spirit make us free for the love of our neighbor as ourselves. But the Spirit works in the Christian community, which exists by love. There is a sense in which freedom is rooted in "the priesthood of believers" as they acknowledge the power of the Word among them; as they become responsible for love; as they testify to God's forgiveness; as they repent and forgive. So emerges freedom, and lust is turned into love. So it is that man's natural quest for liberty is purified of lust and reason's demand for justice is satisfied by love or faithfulness.

In short, political liberty is a rational principle; that is why reason has played a decisive role in its definition. But its vigor and stability require that freedom which is essential to humanity, freedom to love and to be faithful. But this freedom is the gift of God in Christ Jesus and by the working of his Spirit in the church. It is a gift not alien to our humanity, but one that restores us to our true nature; one that opens our eyes once again to the mystery of the human spirit as it lives by the creative and redemptive act of God. Our thesis is that freedom for faithfulness is the work of God the Redeemer, by the Word and the Spirit; and that freedom is necessary for the vigor and stability of political liberty.

Now, we need to look into the working of the Spirit of God. Even while the Old Testament draws our attention to individuals as bearers of the Spirit, and the same is true in the Gospels where Jesus receives the Spirit for the fulfillment of his mission, the New Testament makes it clear that after the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit moved among, as well as in, the people of God. In short, the Spirit creates free men in the community of believers or the church. This is a matter of capital importance. The special charismatic endowment of the servants of God whose task it was to do God's will for

his people must not obscure the fact that the Spirit works *among* the believers, in their common life and in their intercourse one with another or others. Even while freedom from anxiety and for love is an individual affair, it in fact transpires in the association of human beings called the church. The Spirit of God neither recognizes nor indwells individuals as abstracted from society. His common mode of action requires a living and responsible interaction of people; so much so that there is no working of the Spirit apart from the social life of the church. . . .

Obviously, men are quite capable of loving liberty and practicing democracy without the benefit of the church. But, without the love that nourishes freedom and so makes for integrity both in the love of liberty and the practice of democracy, the former is absorbed by the lust for power and the latter suffers a diminution of justice. Where there is not an association of consent to God's law, and men are not quickened by the gospel to obey it, liberty and democracy alike are in constant jeopardy, as well as perpetually in a state of corruption. Besides, where a pious society does not in fact make for vigor in political liberty and economic health for the people, there is no evidence that a church in fact exists.

It should be acknowledged as one of the signs of the integrity of the church that Christians not only care for liberty, but are free to care for it and prefer it to goods, comfort, security, and all that may well cover their anxiety. Christians, of all people, need to be impressed with the peril to liberty in our impulse to save our skins. They need to see the conflict between the law of God and the law of the flesh, and to seek to purify the quest for liberty with their freedom in Christ. And this cannot be done apart from "social education and action," apart from persistent participation in the social struggle for liberty. Since the political and economic life, in which men seek their security and power, is the primary setting for the working of the power of sin and death, there it is that freedom is to be practiced and tested, and exercised toward increase and vigor.

The practice of political liberty *is not only a sign of freedom, but also a necessary occasion for it.* A nonpolitical Christianity is almost certainly a counterfeit, or a church whose members do not pray and labor for liberty can hardly be said to believe, or hope, or love. For without such praying and laboring, the freedom of the Christian man is once again turned to bondage. Even while it is true that liberty needs freedom for its purity and strength, freedom needs the zeal for liberty that it may work in us for our salvation, or our restoration to the image of God, which is our true life and destiny as well as our true and original humanity.

CONVERGENCE and DIVERGENCE from the Standpoint of Philosophy

By Willem F. Zuurdeeg

A woman in Denver writes requesting some Scripture passage that will point up the inescapable social responsibility of Christians in such a way that it will be impossible for even the most apathetic to avoid feeling this responsibility. A man in Chicago asks what can be done to help laymen see the "obvious validity of the church's position on racial desegregation." A pastor in Tennessee is troubled by a group of "liberals" in his church who want the church to support every "liberal" cause, but without any theological awareness that has its roots in the Christian faith.

Why this great diversity among Christians who presumably have received the same theological heritage? Why are some simply not interested at all in the gospel's implications for our common life, while others, though passionately concerned about particular issues, end up on opposite sides of the fence in the positions they take? And why is it that many persons who do not share in the Reformed tradition—humanists, Roman Catholics, Jews, unitarians—find themselves making common cause with Presbyterians on the same issue?

Professor Zuurdeeg suggests some reasons for this strange convergence of people from different theological traditions and divergence of people from the same theological tradition by tracing the influence of three "convictional" streams to which we have all been exposed and by pointing out other forces that help mold our convictions without our being aware of them.

Some "Nontheological" Factors and Our Responses to Them

Our convictions are strongly influenced by "nontheological" factors, for example: (1) by the social class to which we belong—its status in the eyes of the rest of society, its economic values that claim our loyalty, the traditions that are dear to it; (2) by our temperament—prudent-conservative, enthusiastic-progressive, rebellious-revolutionary; (3) by our ability to experience existentially, to identify ourselves with, and become involved in, situations. Some people are constitutionally incapable of living on any level other than that of their own physical involvement, and their appreciation of "other" situations and people is only superficial.

Our convictions also show an embarrassing degree of complexity and inconsistency. We are never simply "Christians" in the sense that our

convictions are informed only by Biblical or "faith" experiences. In any given moment we may be borne along by one or another, or a complex of several, convictions. At another time in another situation, other combinations take over. Some of our convictions come (without our knowledge perhaps) out of Greek origins. Some Christians lean heavily (perhaps exclusively) toward the Pauline, the Johannine, or the apocalyptic aspects of the Gospel message. We are influenced by the Lutheran, the Calvinistic, the Anglican, the left-wing Reformation traditions. We receive indirectly the diluted forces of such diverse people as Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Marx, Freud, Dostoevsky, Barth, Otto, Heidegger, and many others.

Further, we never allow ourselves to become fully aware of these dependencies and influences, i.e., we never attain a complete self-knowledge, and hence never really can separate out the various convictions we do act upon, let alone their sources. We tend to fear our own origins and beliefs, and hence mask them by oversimplifications and distortions.

This self-deception we accomplish by several means: (1) by rationalizing our convictions into well-ordered systems that cut off disturbing and inconsistent elements; (2) by concentrating our attention upon seemingly socially harmless sections of our convictions, such as eschatology, life hereafter, etc.; (3) by taking mental short cuts that sharpen tensions and subtle nuances into black and white contrasts; (4) by never questioning the convictions that are very dear to us, but rather by absolutizing them into authoritative systems and adopting a "heretic complex" to protect them.

Some Philosophical Considerations

We must try to distinguish clearly at least three focuses in our convictions: theology, ethics, and epistemology. We must also assume that most of the people who converge and diverge belong to what could be called three "convictional groups" that can be definitely delineated: the Hebrew Christian, the Greek Cosmos, and the Empiricist convictions. We will omit from our consideration such convictional subgroupings as Existentialism, Naturalism, Individualism, Nationalisms, etc. Also, for the purpose of discussing relationships between Biblical faith and other beliefs we need to use such terms as "convictions," "evaluational world view," "crypto-religion," and "crypto-theology."

Since Haroutunian's paper dealt in some degree with the theological characteristics of the Hebrew Christian convictions, our need here is to examine and evaluate the Greek Cosmos and Empiricist convictions.

Greek Cosmos convictions involve an evaluational world view that proclaims: "the world is essentially a cosmos, a well-ordered whole—rational, good and beautiful, uncreated, eternal, absolute, unchangeable, necessary, divine. Around this center core lies a surface layer, mere appearance, changeable, time-bound, contingent, accidental. Man is a micro-cosmos whose core (reason) corresponds to, participates in, and can penetrate and understand the world core, which is rational and

orderly." The concept of a universal natural law—a system of values and principles, eternal and unchangeable—is one of the derivatives of the Greek Cosmos world view. It would be inaccurate and misleading to think of the Greek Cosmos view as being merely "metaphysical" or "epistemological" in character. It almost inevitably issues in "convictions" that have strong theological and ethical implications.

The Empiricists have been most critical of the Greek Cosmos view. Empiricism is a type of philosophy, not free from "convictions" but much less determined by them. Hume unmasked the Greek Cosmos view as an attempt to construct with the help of reason a picture of the world that is not warranted by any of the legitimate uses of reason. Bacon and Hume both accused the Greek Cosmos people of reading more order into the world than actually can be found, and Hume "destroyed" therewith the validity of the natural law concept. Many moral rules, said he, are widespread and quite permanent, but they are never universal. Rules are mere habits, conventions. Other psychological criticisms were added to the Empiricist philosophical analysis.

According to the present author, this too should be added: the Greek Cosmos view is also a "crypto-theology," a crisis theology that attempts to undergird a sagging society with a new foundation. And this may well be wishful thinking. Plato tried to reintegrate a disintegrating society with the help of an order-conception which is a secular derivative from the order-conviction of a genuine religion, the pre-Homeric one (Athena weaves the cosmic tapestry and sustains in her own way the divine order that makes the life of the world and the life of Athens possible). Furthermore, the Greek Cosmos crypto-theology has been inspired by a craving for certainty. The universality, the necessity and the absoluteness that Plato projected into his view of the cosmos are characteristics of mathematical propositions. *Metabasis eis allo genos!*

A less sanguine Dewey-like version of early Empiricism, which might be called Empiricist instrumentalism, indulged in a careful critique of some of the assumptions of Empiricism: While moral rules are certainly not to be found universally, and cannot be called absolute, eternal, manifestations of a divine Essence, they are neither mere habits nor conventions. There is always something "at stake" to be protected by moral rules. Rules serve "goods," i.e., concrete values like families, schools, towns, whose development and even existence are at stake. Rules make possible goods and goods make possible human life, which is certainly a good of a rather high order. Practically speaking, convictional groups establish rules according to the light that comes to them from what they regard as their Highest Good, which illuminates the meaning of all the lesser goods for them.

The convictional situation of the twentieth century appears to me something like this: the Hebrew Christian convictions, as the inspiring elements in the social and political world, have lost most of their power since around 1700. Greek

Cosmos convictions, in the form of the Enlightenment took over and dominated Western thought until around 1914. And from this Greek Cosmos world view are derived most of the convictions that form the presuppositions of many elements in Western culture: law, science, philosophy, education, church, politics (Marxism, capitalism, and democracy are, philosophically speaking, first cousins).

Today we live in what could be called a post Hebrew Christian and a post Greek Cosmos era. Hebrew Christian convictions are still alive in small circles within the church, but the Greek Cosmos world view (and convictions) has a persistent life, in spite of challenges and attacks, especially in the United States. Social idealism, utopian enthusiasm for the United Nations, certain prevalent theories about public education, and many prominent movements, ideas, and people in the churches, all indicate that Greek Cosmos convictions are still very much alive and influential.

One reason for this may be that Empiricism is convictionally uninspiring, and many people who are explicitly Empiricists philosophically borrow their convictions from the Hebrew Christian and Greek Cosmos view at will. The John Dewey version of Empiricism is very influential. For those who reject all three world views, nontheological factors have led to attempts to construct still other evaluational world views, e.g., in Whitehead and Sartre. Other results of the conscious rejection of all three have led to frustrations and abortive efforts like totalitarianisms and hypernationalisms.

Some light now can be cast on the problem of divergence by dividing the above factors into two groups, which help explain respectively the differences among Christians of the same convictional group as to (*a*) their stand on specific issues and (*b*) the depth of their social concern. Differences in stands on specific issues may be in part explained by understanding the extent to which certain aspects of the Biblical message are influential to the exclusion of others; by understanding the extent to which Greek Cosmos convictions are influential; and by understanding the extent to which certain other non-Christian convictions are influential, in the life of any given person. Perhaps psychoanalysis would be necessary in order to separate all these various convictional influences from one another in the life of any given person. Differences in depth of concern may in part be explained by understanding the temperament, life situation, impact of social and economic forces, and the degree of rationalization or distortion in the life of any given person.

Elements of Theological Evaluation

The effort to distinguish among the three major convictional groups made above, though justifiable philosophically, may be invalid theologically, since as Christians we are mandated to think as Christians, i.e., as members of the Hebrew Christian convictional group. Thus as Christians we should find that the Hebrew Christian (or Biblical) world view is the standpoint from which, or provides the framework from within which, we must view all realities. If I understand this Biblical world view

adequately, justice and the knowledge of God are not simply implications, consequences, or applications of the Hebrew Christian faith, but of its very life.

From the philosophical point of view we can distinguish between (*a*) moral convictions and (*b*) All-convictions, i.e., between relative and absolute convictions. Some people may adhere strongly to their All-convictions, while neglecting any concern about certain specific moral convictions (they might be called escapists). Others, among them many church people, may live constantly in the midst of specific moral convictions while being very uncertain or self-deceived about their All-convictions. Some agnostics are very vehement about their specific moral convictions and fiercely deny the legitimacy of having any All-convictions. Christians can co-operate meaningfully and effectively on an *ad hoc* basis on specific issues with those people who fall into both of the last two categories, but they will probably find it impossible to co-operate on specific social issues with the escapists.

It should be clear that thoughtful Christians cannot go back and embrace a Greek Cosmos world view not only because Hume's critique still stands as valid, but above all because the Greek Cosmos view involves the Christian in idolatry, illusion, and a serious misinterpretation of man and the world. The Enlightenment convictions give no satisfactory account of sin, death, conflict, and the continuing reality of a certain element of absurdity about life as we know it. Enlightenment crypto-theology is neither shocked nor deeply concerned about these elements which are very real to the Biblical view of life.

On the other hand, Western civilization and even life itself today is quite unthinkable without certain elements of the Greek Cosmos world view injected into the public order. We certainly assume tacitly and practically that man, the world, and society are "reasonable to a certain extent." The Greek Cosmos view, qualified in this way, is not incompatible with the Hebrew Christian view.

In the vacuum created by the collapse of the Greek Cosmos world view (Lippmann calls one aspect of this "the collapse of the traditions of civility") the church cannot support the Empiricist conception of rules as being mere habits and conventions, but rather the concept that sees rules as serving concrete goods and human life. For the church and the Christian this implies several things: (1) the basic tone of the Christian life is that of gratitude to God for what he has given—our lives, the goods we enjoy and without which life would be impossible; (2) we must try to understand the meaning of all these relative goods in the eyes of God, which means avoiding the temptation to absolutize those particular goods that mean much to us; (3) rules are even more vitally important for the Christian than for anyone else, as protections of goods against the corruptive and destructive power of sin; however, freedom is also vitally important for the Christian, and the relationships between rules and freedom are not yet fully understood in the context of the Biblical concern about social jus-

tice; (4) some goods are of strong instrumental character, viz., a democratic structure of state and society, democratic procedures in law and politics; the whole system of relationships between such goods and the rules that are necessary to maintain them has been evolved only after centuries of hard courage, hard work, and hard thinking; this system of relationships is also, in Barth's thinking and that of many contemporary theologians, a gift of God's grace—something precious to be defended.

These problems and relationships pose serious and as yet unplanned tasks for contemporary Reformed theology; there is urgent need for at least the following: (1) a continued clarification of our own faith in the context of a modern, complex, industrialized, and highly organized society; (2) as much discussion as possible with Christian groups who are rooted in other theological soil, and with certain non-Christian convictional groups; (3) a consideration of how it may be possible to arrive at an acceptable concept of the Greek Cosmos world view, qualified by Christian critique, that may fill the vacuum created in the civil order by the collapse of the concept of natural law; (4) a discussion of two types of basic issues, one of which seems to require but one Christian stand (e.g., race relations) and another of which seems to tolerate two or more possible positions (e.g., war); (5) the preservation of the sharp awareness that in all such discussions, rules and goods, for the Christian, are of a relative (i.e., relational) character.

It is acknowledged that this paper raises more problems than it answers.

The Third Use of the Law in Calvin's Theology

By Edward A. Dowey

In the thirteenth century the great Thomistic Synthesis rationalized the relationship between faith and philosophy, ecclesiastical authority and civil authority, theology and ethics into a structure that helped hold Western civilization together for over three hundred years. Calvinism exercised a comparable influence in some areas of Western culture well into the nineteenth century, in spite of (many would say) what Calvinistic orthodoxy did to Calvin's own thought.

According to Professor Dowey, Calvin made a significant contribution in his time to a workable relationship between the Christian community and the civil community in his concept of "the third use of the law." Although society has changed radically since the Reformation, a contemporary understanding of Calvin's *usus tertius* could help Christians hammer out a Biblically oriented rationale for the vexing problems of faith and ethics today. Dowey claims in this article that modern Christians must seek "a new relevance of the gospel in our day" in order "to accomplish in our culture that which Calvin's conception of the third use of the law accomplished, if only temporarily, in his."

I. The Term and Its Meaning

The term "third use," particularly in the Latin form *usus tertius*, is scarcely recognized in American theology today. On the Continent, however, during the period of Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy and since, it has been one of the commonest distinguishing marks of the tradition that stemmed from Calvin as over against that which had its origin with Luther.

The chief problem of Reformation piety and theology was, as it had been for Augustine and Paul, that of the relationship between law and gospel. For Luther there were two of these so-called "uses" of the law. First, the civil use, which means the role of the Old Testament law as a basis and guide for order in society. This use has no special relationship to the church but is a base for political and social ethics, and also a ground on which the state can organize itself and guide itself to maintain order in society even by force. Secondly, the law was for Luther a means

of the conviction of sin. This he called the "theological" use of the law, and it was in his conception the chief function of the law for the believer. But in so far as faith was present, the law lost its role as a convictor, as the bringer of God's wrath and curse. For Luther the "liberty of the Christian man" was precisely freedom from the law in this sense. These two "uses" summarized Luther's conception of the role of law in his theology. . . . There was thus no third role.

Luther's associate, Melanchthon, introduced a third use for the law. It was called the use of the law to the believer, or *usus in renatis*. This was the law as a guide to the Christian. However, it was not to play a major role in Lutheran orthodoxy even though it does appear in the Formula of Concord. The statement there, by the way, seems to assimilate the "third use" back into the "second." It was Calvin who took over this conception of the third role of law and made it important both in theology proper and in church and society wherever the Calvinist ethos was present. We have thus in Calvin three uses of the law:

1. *Usus elenchticus,* which is really Luther's "theological" use of the law as a convictor of sin. The Old Testament moral law functions in this way, says Calvin, for both believers and those who may remain nonbelievers.

2. *Usus politicus,* which is Luther's civil use. This is the role of the law to keep order in society whether among those who are believers or those who do not know the gospel.

3. *Usus in renatis,* which, according to Calvin and in contradistinction from the others, was the chief or principal use of the law. The law here (and its summary as "love") continues to function by showing the Christian God's will.

II. The Historical Setting

It is extremely important in understanding the role of law in Reformation theology to be constantly aware of the fact that the medieval period out of which the Reformation grew was a period of law par excellence. The developments that led up to the great medieval Synthesis were in a large measure the developments of law. Early scholastic theology was scarcely distinguishable from the collection and codification of canon law. The body of canon law in the realm of redemption, and the body of civil law, in the realm of the state and political life—these two together included in a rational structure the whole life of man, whether in society at large or specifically as he participated in the redemption provided by Christ. The completeness and wholeness of these two structures, and especially their synthesis into one in such medieval systems as we have in Aquinas, gave an impressively comprehensive and rational picture of the total life of man in this world and the next. This made it possible to understand what man was doing for or against God and to estimate rather accurately his relationship to God, the devil, and the angels. At

least this is the impression late medieval culture made on Luther and the Reformers.

In this world the gospel had lost its strangeness. The conception of grace had been pretty well domesticated, or we might say naturalized. The mystery of grace had been lost in a large measure because the means of grace had been so thoroughly reduced to prescriptive laws that were as completely understandable over against the natural world as were the laws of the civil community. . . .

What Luther did was, in a word, to take this whole medieval synthesis of law and gospel with complete seriousness. And when he took seriously all the possibilities for sin and redemption, as well as the sacramental system by which the former was overcome and the latter was realized, he was cast into utter and complete despair. Luther, as very few before him, had actually tried to enumerate all his sins in fulfilling the conditions of the sacrament of penance. It nearly drove him mad, as it must anyone who takes self-achieved merit with ultimate religious seriousness. Thus, for Luther, the role of the medieval legal and theological synthesis played exactly the same role as had the Old Testament law for Paul. It threw him on the grace of Christ.

Luther's emphasis in theology and in the church thus was upon the freedom from the law which comes through faith in Christ. This conception, together with certain political and social conditions, caused the Lutheran tradition to develop in such a way that it depended for order in the church and in society upon the secular rulers. The law was gone. Man's freedom from it as a believer could be expressed in the immediate guidance of the love of Christ in his life. . . .

Whether or not the difference between the two kinds of society that developed under Lutheran and Reformed theology can be attributed entirely to the third use of the law, this term "third use" has throughout the history of Lutheran and Reformed polemics served as a symbol for expressing a difference that was actually present in the two churches and the two types of society that they helped create.

III. Law in Calvin's Institutes, Book II

1. "Written Law" and the Law of Nature

When Calvin wrote of "the law," he distinguished among three different meanings. First, by law, he meant "the whole religion of Moses." Secondly, he meant the moral law, particularly as found in the Ten Commandments. Thirdly, he meant laws in the plural, or precepts of laws, or "constitutions." The latter is what we mean in our day by positive law, or those specific formulations that make up the legal structure of any given community. For our use here, we are thinking primarily of the second and the third of these conceptions of law. Above all we mean the moral law.

For Calvin, the Old Testament "written law" was a specific formula-

tion of the moral law itself for a specific purpose. And this moral law was to be identified as to content with the law of nature. Hence we can say that there is a complete identity in Calvin's thought between the content of the moral law as written in the Old Testament and the content of the law of nature, or what can loosely be called "natural law." However, it is not the content of either of these that determines the way Calvin treats them in his theology. This is determined rather by the specific occasion under which this law was written down in the Old Testament. That is to say that it is the time and the role of the written law in the history of salvation that dominates Calvin's treatment of the law in the *Institutes*.

The occasion for writing down the Ten Commandments was a crisis in human sinfulness among the chosen people. God did not give the written law to everyone. He gave it specifically to his covenant people. Therefore, although the law is a restatement of the law of nature, it falls within the covenant of grace.

2. The Place of the Law in the History of Salvation

Calvin is perfectly clear in his every treatment of the law that the written law belongs solely to the chosen people. It was given by God, not to all mankind, but to those through whom he would work his redemption. . . . *Thus we can say that for Calvin throughout his theology law stands within the context of grace.*

The thing which to Calvin distinguished the chosen people was the *promise*. The promise of redemption was what created the people and gave them their reason for being. The moral law alone without the promise would only lead to despair. The ceremonial law was even more discouraging without the promise, because it would consist then merely of empty symbols and of rituals. The moral law offered conditional salvation, which no one could fulfill. And the ceremonial law offered the kind of salvation that man also could not achieve for himself. There was, therefore, no peace of conscience in the law when it was taken out of the context of the promise. And "peace of conscience" is, in the language of the sixteenth century, the goal of all moral and religious striving. . . .

3. General Interpretive Principles

Calvin's treatment of the law in the *Institutes* is preceded by three general principles of interpretation.

a. The moral law requires inward as well as external observance. According to Calvin the complete harmony of the individual with God's will was required not only by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, but in the entire Old Testament legal system. Here Calvin was specifically rejecting the conception that Christ had added "inwardness" to the observance of the law. In so far as Christ was a legal teacher, say in the Sermon on the Mount, he added absolutely nothing to the law as given by Moses. The only function Christ had with reference to law in this sense was to make it clearer, more easily understood, and more precise. He was not in any sense a new lawgiver.

b. Each one of the Ten Commandments, according to Calvin, is to be understood by synecdoche. This

rhetorical term refers to a figure of speech by which reference to part of a thing may be taken as carrying the meaning of the whole. Thus a single law such as "Thou shalt not kill" is by synecdoche only a partial statement of what God really means by the law. To interpret properly we must ask three questions. First, what is the subject of this commandment . . . ? Second, what is the end or purpose of this commandment? And third, what is the aim or tendency of the commandment over and above the specific form in which it is stated . . . ? We thus end with an interpretation of the commandment against killing that reads as follows: we must do all things possible at all times to preserve the life of our neighbor. Calvin does something like this with all ten of the commandments. . . .

4. Love, Summary of the Law

Calvin takes very seriously both Old Testament and New Testament summaries of the law as love. He insists that the first table of the Decalogue has to do with worship or piety, or the relationship of man to God. The second table of the law has to do with charity or obedience, or the relationship of man to his fellow man. All this Jesus summarized under the term "love." It is very important to realize that for Calvin the primary emphasis is upon this positive affirmation of love and not the negative form in which the law is stated in the Ten Commandments. For Calvin there is an orderliness about love which in no way violates its freedom and spontaneity. There is no contradiction for Calvin in using almost interchangeably the terms "law" and "love," or "equity" and "love." That is to say that law in its essence can never be heteronomous except through the "accident" of sin. Hence, he can make much more positive use of the law in connection with the believer who knows God's grace, than could Luther.

IV. The Role of Law in Calvin's Theology as a Whole

It is evident from the foregoing that when Calvin uses the term "law" he does not mean primarily the negative, convicting aspect of law, but rather something positive. . . . God's universal, orderly will for all his creation is expressed, says Calvin, within the history of salvation by special accommodation to the chosen people who must understand it positively through analysis by synecdoche. The law itself, thus, is not to be confused with laws in the plural, even the Ten Commandments. Rather we are to see behind these specific statements the positive will of God for the harmonious, orderly, and loving relationship that should exist between and among him and all his creatures.

It is well to introduce at this point Calvin's doctrine of providence in the understanding of this conception of the law of nature. While Calvin can use the term "natural law," and mean by it the will of God in creation, he never means by it a series of formal structures or laws laid

down that in any sense violate the essential freedom of man in creation. Furthermore, the law or laws of nature for Calvin as he understood them in his doctrine of providence are purely descriptive, or ways of referring to the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God in his creation.

Calvin calls his own doctrine "particular providence" and by this he means that specific will of God is in everything that happens. When a question is raised, for instance, about the storm at sea in the story of Jonah, Calvin simply says that it should be no mystery that God should raise this storm for a special purpose, "because no wind ever blows without the specific volition of God." He says elsewhere that as no sparrow falls without our Father, so no drop of rain ever falls without his particular providence and special act of will. We have thus in Calvin's theology no conflict between a formal and legal structure on the one hand and on the other the vitalities of nature and the freedom and spontaneity of man. Rather we have an apprehension that the vitalities of natural processes and of man's freedom, when they are exercised according to God's orderly will in creation, are in no sense in opposition to one another. I would say, thus, that the most striking characteristic in Calvin's overwhelming conception of law is not, as for Luther, the curse of the law, but rather the law as the structure of love.

If we understand law as God's universal, orderly will for all his creatures, and the human conscience as the subjective awareness of law in the heart of man, then we can see how both have been violated by the sin of man. Sin separates man from himself, from his own nature, from the world at large—and this means really from God. Thus we can also understand the role of the term "justification." If man loses his "justice," that is to say, loses his right relationship to God, he stands in need of being justified, of being put back in a right relationship in spite of his inability to accomplish righteousness himself. Only so can he exercise his Christian liberty as God meant him to, in the context of peace with God which has been provided through the sacrifice of Christ. This, of course, is never realized in the present life and hence we have in Calvin's theology, in Paul's theology, and in *every* Christian theology that realizes its essentially soteriological character the problem of the grace of the gospel which pronounces us to be free over against God, and yet the problem of the persistence of sin in our lives, the very sin that made it necessary for God to restate the law to us. Hence, there exists in Calvin's theology a hiatus or break between law and gospel because the life of man, even the believer, is continued within human history, which always remains sinful. The faith of the believer must always be completed by hope. That means that it is oriented toward the eschatological future. In the sinful present the believer remains a man whose Christian liberty has been established through the peace with God that the work of Christ has bought. However, he also remains partly under the dominion of sin and therefore very much in need of the guidance of the moral law, particularly as it is expressed in the accommodated form of the

written law. Any particular ethical decision, however, or any particular form of state and society, or any set of given laws—any of these things—represents *an interpretation* by sinful man of the universal, orderly will of God for creation in terms of his particular situation.

The error of medieval Roman Catholicism was that it bridged this gap with the conception of the overall coherence of civil law and canon law, with the "natural law" that had its grounds and pattern in God. The Lutheran part of the Reformation broke up this continuum with the affirmation on the one hand that such a conception of law is intolerable to the human being and casts him into despair, and on the other hand the affirmation that *man cannot in his sinful state accurately read what is the law of nature and apply it in given conditions.*

The Calvinists' tendency was, on the basis of the Lutheran evangelical understanding of grace and the Lutheran rejection of law in the old sense, to reconstitute an evangelical position that would at the same time remain based on the gospel of grace and be an adequate foundation for human responsibility in all of society.

Although the separation between the natural law and the specific constitution was maintained in theological *principle,* in actual fact both Geneva and the succeeding Calvinist societies tended to identify the particular laws of their community with the law of God itself. This was a great danger to them partly because the tradition of natural law remains strong both in Luther and in Calvin as a way of understanding secular society, and thus was always available for this kind of misuse.

V. The Contemporary Problem

In our day we have a new type of problem. Through the intervening centuries the conception of natural law has suffered a great many changes, until in the twentieth century a positivistic attitude prevails by which there is a denial that the mind of man can discover *any* universal law of nature which should govern his actions in society. It is primarily in the continuing Roman Catholic tradition that the older conception of natural law is still alive. Comparative cultural studies have driven contemporary students of law to the conclusion that, by and large, what was formerly called natural law was simply the expression of the culture in which the legal system grew up, and that it had no ultimate reference to anything inherent in nature itself. The extreme of this development seems to have been reached, and there are evidences of some return to the older tradition. But there must be caution about the identification of the "natural" as God's will. The concept of God's "accommodation" to man's need of interpretation by "synecdoche," and the appreciation of the continuance of sin in the believer (all drawn from Calvin's thought) may well serve to implement that caution in the development of ethics in the context of Reformed theology.

It seems to me that the richness and completeness and, so to speak, historical success, of the Calvinist ethic in the terms given above can teach us a great deal about the problems we face and the consistency and coherency of the kind of thinking that we must use in an effort to solve these problems on a sound Biblical basis.

I think that the most important thing to learn from Calvin in this connection is a method of procedure that begins with a conception of the gospel that gets its social direction from Old and New Testament "law," and at the same time faces social problems with openness rather than doctrinaire solutions. Hence, we point here, not "back to Calvin," but forward with the aid of a knowledge of what Calvin and his tradition accomplished in forming a number of admirable societies of the past.

The history of the Calvinist movement certainly shows that it is always in danger of a new legalism, just as the history of the Lutheran churches show that they are always in danger of social irresponsibility. In our day we should be able to profit by both the Lutheran and the Calvinistic conceptions that have come out of the sixteenth century. We should apply ourselves to rethinking these two emphases and the dangers that are inherent in them, yet boldly affirm and express the relevance of the gospel for our new and vast problems. We might thus accomplish in our culture that which Calvin's conception of the third use of the law accomplished, if only temporarily, in centuries past.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

for the Interpretation of the Bible

as accepted by the ecumenical Study Conference, held in Oxford from June 29 to July 5, 1949

Hermeneutics is that branch of theology which defines the principles by which the Scriptures are to be interpreted. The fact that devout Christians are using the Bible to support, for example, both racial segregation and racial desegregation suggests that this is possible only because no commonly accepted process or set of principles exists by which the Word of God in Scripture is honestly sought. Especially in a day when social problems are complex in the extreme, a working knowledge of how to seek light from the Bible on these problems is essential to any sincere Christian or group of Christians.

In the summer of 1949 at Oxford a group of eighteen scholars met to try to draft such a set of principles. They came from four great theological traditions—Reformed, Anglican, Lutheran, and Eastern Orthodox—and from three continents—North America, Europe, and Asia. They met under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. Out of their wrestling came "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible."

Dr. George Ernest Wright, who was a member of the McCormick Study Group, was also a member of that study group which met at Oxford. He writes of their efforts: "For centuries the churches have been dividing and subdividing on the issues here considered. For the first time in history, as far as I am aware, a representative group of churchmen met on an ecumenical basis and tried to reach a consensus on one of the most critical issues facing the church. In such a document one should not look for something spectacular, brilliant, or completely new. It is impossible for group discussion to produce that type of thing. Consequently, any significance that the statement possesses must be evaluated in the light of what could and could not be agreed upon and what still remains to be considered."

I. The Necessary Theological Presuppositions of Biblical Interpretation

A. It is agreed that the Bible is our common starting point, for there God's word confronts us, a word which humbles the hearers so that they are more ready to listen and to discuss than they are to assert their own opinions.

B. It is agreed that the primary message of the Bible concerns God's gracious and redemptive activity for the saving of sinful man that He might create in Jesus Christ a people for himself. In this the Bible's central concern, an authoritative claim is placed upon man, and he is called upon to respond in faith and obedience throughout the whole of his life and work. The law of love has always a binding and compelling hold upon us, and in it we encounter the inescapable will of God. On the other hand, in the more specific laws provided for the detailed organization of the social life of a people who lived under conditions different from our own, we should through reverent and serious study seek to distinguish in the light of God's revelation in Christ the permanently binding from that of purely local and temporal significance.

C. It is agreed that the starting point of the Christian interpreter lies within the redeemed community of which by faith he is a member.

D. It is agreed that the center and the goal of the whole Bible is Jesus Christ. This gives the two Testaments a perspective in which Jesus Christ is seen both as the fulfillment and the end of the law.

E. It is agreed that the unity of the Old and the New Testament is not to be found in any naturalistic development, or in any static identity, but in the ongoing redemptive activity of God in the history of one people, reaching its fulfillment in Christ. Accordingly it is of decisive importance for hermeneutical method to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the total revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, from which arises the full Trinitarian faith of the church.

F. It is agreed that allegorical interpretations which were not intended by the Biblical authors are arbitrary and their use may be a disservice to the proper recognition of Biblical authority. But Christian exegesis has been justified recognizing as divinely established a certain correspondence between some events and teachings of the Old and of the New Testament.

G. It is agreed that although we may differ in the manner in which tradition, reason, and natural law may be used in the interpretation of Scripture, any teaching that clearly contradicts the Biblical position cannot be accepted as Christian.

II. The Interpretation of a Specific Passage

A. It is agreed that one must start with a historical and critical examination of the passage. This includes:

1. The determination of the text;
2. The literary form of the passage;
3. The historical situation, the *Sitz im Leben;*

4. The meaning that the words had for the original author and bearer or reader;

5. The understanding of the passage in the light of its total context and the background out of which it emerged.

B. It is agreed that in the case of an Old Testament passage, one must examine and expound it in relation to the revelation of God to Israel both before and after its own period. Then the interpreter should turn to the New Testament in order to view the passage in that perspective. In this procedure the Old Testament passage may receive limitation and correction, and it may also disclose in the light of the New Testament a new and more profound significance unknown to the original writer.

C. It is agreed that in the case of a New Testament passage one should examine it in the light of its setting and context; then turn to the Old Testament to discover its background in God's former revelation. Returning again to the New Testament, one is able to see and expound the passage in the light of the whole scope of *Heilsgeschichte*. Here our understanding of a New Testament passage may be deepened through our apprehension of the Old.

III. The Discovery of the Biblical Teaching on a Specific Social or Political Issue

A. It is agreed that one must begin with a direct study of the Biblical text in relation to a given problem; otherwise the general principles that we establish will reflect more the presuppositions of our own time than the message of the Bible. Only then may we safely deduce applications for our own situation.

B. It is agreed that in examining a particular modern problem we should consider the Old Testament evidence as well, in order to view the problem in the light of God's total revelation. In following this procedure, historical differences in the various parts of Scripture must not be overlooked, otherwise the amassing of various texts may be done in too facile a manner and the Bible made to present a united witness on a topic which in fact it does not do. Furthermore, care should be used to see the correct proportions so that too much emphasis may not be placed on a single passage and the correct Biblical perspective be lost.

C. It is agreed that the Biblical teaching on social and political issues must be viewed in the light of the tension between life in the kingdoms of this world and participation in the Kingdom of God. While there has not been time in this conference to explore our understanding of the relation of ethics to eschatology, we are agreed that the Scriptural teaching of the two ages has an important bearing upon the way in which a specific social or political issue is to be interpreted.

IV. The Application of the Biblical Message to the Modern World

A. It is agreed that if we are to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, we must discover the degree to which our particular situation is similar to that which the Bible presents. It must be remembered that absolute

identity of situation is never found, and therefore the problem of adaptation becomes acute. Nevertheless, in each new situation we must allow ourselves to be guided by the Bible to a knowledge of the will of God.

B. It is agreed that the Bible speaks primarily to the church, but it also speaks through the church to the world inasmuch as the whole world is claimed by the church's Lord. The church can best speak to the world by becoming the church remade by the word of God.

C. It is agreed that in applying the Biblical message to our day, interpreters diverge because of differing doctrinal and ecclesiastical traditions, differing ethical, political, and cultural outlooks, differing geographical and sociological situations, differing temperaments and gifts. It is, however, an actual experience within the ecumenical movement, that when we meet together, with presuppositions of which we may be largely unconscious, and bring these presuppositions to the judgment of Scripture, some of the very difficulties are removed that prevent the gospel from being heard. Thus the Bible itself leads us back to the living Word of God.

Members of the Conference: Prof. C. T. Craig, Madison, N.J., U.S.A.; Prof. V. E. Devadutt, Serampore, West Bengal, India; Prof. C. H. Dodd, Cambridge, England; Prof. W. Eichrodt, Basel, Switzerland; Prof. G. Florovsky, New York 27, N.Y., U.S.A.; Prof. J. Marsh, Oxford, England; Dr. G. Mayeda, Japan; D. L. Munby, Oxford, England; Prof. N. W. Porteous, Edinburgh 10, Scotland; Rev. Canon A. Richardson, Durham, England (Chairman); Prof. E. Schlink, Heidelberg, Germany; Dr. W. Schweitzer, Geneva, Switzerland (Secretary); Rev. O. S. Tomkins, London W.C. 2, England; Rev. T. T. Torrance, Aberdeen, Scotland; Prof. L. J. Trinterud, Chicago 14, Ill., U.S.A.; Prof. G. E. Wright, Chicago 14, Ill., U.S.A.

Present Only in the Last Days: Bishop A. Nygren, Lund, Sweden; Prof. G. Staehlin, Erlangen, Germany.

Youth Delegation: Mr. A. Adegbola, Nigeria, pro tem: Richmond, Surrey, England; Mr. J. A. Atger, Grenoble (Isère), France; Mr. N. S. Booth, Jr., Boston, Mass., U.S.A.; Mr. J. Gibbs, Preston, Lancashire, England.

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